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SOVIET SEA POWER

During the past two decades, the USSR has become the world's second maritime power, ranking only behind the United States. When Admiral Gorshkov assumed command of the Soviet Navy in 1956, it was largely a waterborne adjunct of the ground forces. Today, however, it is a well balanced, modern force which is equally at home on the high seas as it is in coastal waters. Increasingly large and varied deployments since the mid-1960's have served notice to others that the Soviet navy is on the move.

Soviet naval units now frequent waters which only a few years ago were considered the private preserve of western naval forces. In 1964 the Soviet navy began continous deployments in the Mediterranean. Since the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967, a flotilla of nuclear submarines and missile-armed surface ships has been operating there. The flotilla has reached as many as 65 naval vessels, including submarines and support ships. Today, Soviet naval forces constitute a major political and military presence in the

Mediterranean. Soviet ships also operate in the Indian Ocean now and in the farthest reaches of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Soviet submarines and warships have operated near or made port calls in a number of countries from the Caribbean to Africa and Southeast Asia.

The world-wide naval operation "Ocean" which was conducted during April of this year was the most extensive exercise ever conducted by the Soviet navy. At the height of "Ocean" more than 200 ships and submarines were taking part in the Atlantic, Pacific and Mediterranean. In addition to the naval units, elements of the Soviet air force and marine forces participated in the operations. The announced theme of the exercise was one of homeland defense and, as staged, it provided valuable training against submarines, simulated aircraft carrier groups, and in amphibious landing operations.

The greatest Soviet naval strength is in its submarine force, the largest ever created. The fleet presently has about 350 submarines, 80 of which are nuclear-powered. The new Soviet Polaris-type submarine can fire 16 ballistic missiles to a range of about 1300 miles. About twelve units of this class are already operational, and these units probably are being produced

at the rate of about six to eight each year. At the present rate of construction, the Soviet fleet of Y-class ballistic missile submarines could outnumber the US fleet of 41 Polaris submarines by 1974. About 40 older ballistic-missile submarines carry three launchers each. Only nine of these submarines are nuclear powered, and most of them are believed to be targeted against European and Asian targets.

The Soviet navy has about 40 submarines equipped with cruise missiles having ranges up to about 250 miles. These submarines probably are intended to attack naval and merchant ships. Some 300 other submarines are configured for torpedo-attack missions against surface ships or other submarines.

The Soviets are developing three new classes of attack submarines whose mission probably will be to seek out and destroy other submarines. This large and versatile submarine fleet serves as a triple threat: to the continental US, to US naval task forces at sea, and to our sea lines of communications.

Because of the Soviets large naval shipbuilding program of the mid-1950's, only a small percentage of Soviet warships are more than 20 years old. In addition, all of the major surface ships built in the

USSR since 1960 have been armed with surface-to-air or surface-to-surface missiles.

The Soviet surface fleet now includes two helicopter carriers, about 24 cruisers, 35 guided-missile destroyers, 50 gun-armed destroyers, more than 100 destroyer escorts, and some 2,500 smaller ships, mine-sweepers, coastal escorts, support craft, and intelligence collectors.

The sea-going navy is backed up by a land-based air arm. The naval air force has increased in size in the last few years and currently has about 500 bombers and 370 other aircraft for reconnaissance, antisubmarine warfare, and transport. The aircraft are based primarily on the European coastline of the Soviet Union. Many of the bombers are equipped with air-to-surface missiles. These constitute a formidable adjunct to the surface-to-surface missiles carried by Soviet submarines and surface ships.

The Soviets have developed effective antiship missile systems. Such missiles permit Soviet aircraft to launch attacks on surface ships beyond the range of antiaircraft defenses. These air-launched missiles have ranges from 100 to 150 miles. Shorter range surface-to-surface missilesenable small torpedo boats to duel with battleships and cruisers by outranging the conventional naval artillery on these ships. One

of these missiles, the Styx, was used to sink the Israeli destroyer Eilat in 1967. The Soviet's new Kresta and Kynda-class cruisers are armed with the 150 mile Shaddock missile. The Soviets are developing new missiles for their new ships.

Although cruise missile-equipped submarines, surface ships, and aircraft have provided the Soviets with a significant capability against western naval surface forces, especially in water adjacent to the European landmass, Soviet antisubmarine capabilities in the open ocean remain limited. Among all the branches of naval science and tactics, the Soviets lag behind the United States most in antisubmarine warfare. But the US technological lead is shortening. The Soviets are working hard to develop an effective counter to US submarine-launched ballistic missiles. Soviet improvements in ASW are reflected in the use of radar, sonar buoys, and airborne magnetic detection gear. Active sonar ranges probably are still short, but marked improvements can be expected.

Observation of recent Soviet naval activities in the Mediterranean has revealed information on Soviet ASW tactics, especially on the role of the new helicopter carriers. The helicopter carrier

Moskva spent nearly all of a recent six-week cruise in the Mediterranean practicing ASW against Soviet nuclear-powered and conventional submarines. The Moskva is equipped with a variety of new submarine detection systems including radar and sonar gear, and her helicopters are equipped with "dunking" or "dipping" sonar. The big question, however, appears to be the long-range implications of the two Soviet helicopter carriers. It remains to be seen whether the Soviets' experience with these ships will lead them to build a number of additional ones as the nucleus of an ocean-going antisubmarine force.

Increased Soviet interest in amphibious landing operations became apparent in 1967 with the introduction of tank landing ships, some of which have been deployed to the Mediterranean since the June war in 1967. The small force of Soviet marines is believed to number only about 6,000 men, however.

In addition to Soviet naval power, the USSRs' merchant marine is being expanded. Since 1958, the Soviet Union has advanced from 21st to 5th place among the maritime nations of the world. This growth in the USSR's merchant marine is another measure of the Soviets' expanding maritime interests and, with the Soviet navy, will be capable of exerting a strong

maritime influence on world affairs for years to come.

In sum, the Soviet navy has changed from a purely coastal defense force into a deepwater navy capable of worldwide employment and possessing a significant capability in its cruise missile arsenal. This increased naval strength will enable the Soviets to backup their diplomacy with a meaningful military presence in many parts of the world whenever their interests require it. It will also provide the Kremlin with new options for intervention or pressure in crisis areas and with significant combat capabilities should those crises break into actual hostilities.